

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2999

As Reported by House Committee On: Education

Title: An act relating to releasing the questions from the Washington assessment of student learning.

Brief Description: Requiring that the high school WASL questions and answers be released to parents and on the internet.

Sponsors: Representatives P. Sullivan, Talcott, Quall, Simpson, Nixon, Dickerson, Rodne, B. Sullivan, Schindler, Santos, Roach, McCune, Hasegawa, Springer and Kenney.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/30/06, 2/1/06 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), beginning in 2009, to release the complete tenth grade Washington assessment of student learning (WASL), including the correct responses, at the same time it releases student scores.
- Requires the SPI to provide parents with information regarding their students' responses on the WASL compared to the correct responses and information about how to obtain a paper or electronic copy of the test.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; P. Sullivan, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Curtis, Haigh, Hunter, McDermott, Priest, Santos, Tom and Wallace.

Staff: Sarah Ream (786-7303).

Background:

Each fall, parents of students who took the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) the previous spring receive their student's results. Some information is provided about content and skill areas where the student may need improvement, but for test security reasons, the test questions and student answers to individual questions are not released.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) follows a schedule regarding test question development, pilot testing, use, and expiration. The SPI discards a test question after it has been used several times because any recognition of the question might bias the test results. In 2001, the SPI began releasing these discarded test questions, along with student responses, so schools can use questions and responses to help diagnose areas where students are having difficulty. Approximately one-third of the total questions from the WASL are tentatively scheduled to be released each year.

Summary of Bill:

Beginning with the 2009 assessment, the SPI must release the complete tenth grade WASL, including the correct responses, at the same time it releases student scores. Test information provided to parents must include the student's responses compared to the correct responses and information about how to obtain a copy of the test. School districts must supply paper or electronic copies of the test on request.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (In support) Parents are an integral part of their children's education. The WASL needs to be returned so parents know exactly where their children need further assistance. There are challenges for the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) associated with releasing the assessment, but these can be worked with. Without releasing the full assessment, parents will not know when or how to appeal the results of an administration of the assessment. This is a big-ticket item, but we cannot afford to not return the WASL. Massachusetts releases its assessment every year, which is very helpful to students, parents, and teachers. Returning the assessment is also about public trust, transparency, and parent engagement. Parents need the school doors to be wide open, and this bill helps do that.

(With Concerns): It will cost the state \$4.3 million to return the full assessment. If that money is spent on returning the assessment, what programs will be cut? This funding could be better spent on remediation and staff training.

Returning the full assessment will reduce the reliability and validity of the exam. The piloting and equating methodology currently used by the OSPI would need to be changed. The OSPI repeats a set number of assessment items with each administration. This allows the OSPI to know statistically whether the assessment is staying consistent between administrations. Currently, all writing prompts for the written portion of the assessment are released. The OSPI releases items from the exam annually.

Parents may review the entire assessment booklet under secure conditions at the school district or the OSPI. It takes approximately 45 days for the exam booklet to be transferred to the district for review by a parent. Parents and students are currently given strand data from the assessment. This data provides them with information regarding the student's strengths and weaknesses.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative P. Sullivan, prime sponsor; and Mary Kenfield, Washington State Parent Teacher Association.

(With concerns) Leslie Goldstein, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Greg Hall, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.